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ABSTRACT

Prompted by the accelerating growth in the use of education service agencies (ESAs) to improve state systems of education, this discussion of major policy issues and a proposed research agenda is addressed to policy planners at the state or local levels and to policy and research communities. The purpose of the paper is to raise and clarify issues rather than to settle them. The paper is divided according to six features of ESA operations: (1) primary mission, programs, and services; (2) establishment; (3) governance; (4) financing; (5) staffing; and (6) physical facilities. A total of 25 major policy issues and 41 research and development proposals are presented. The document does not discuss whether or not ESAs should be supported nor does it concern itself with implementation procedures. (Author/WD)

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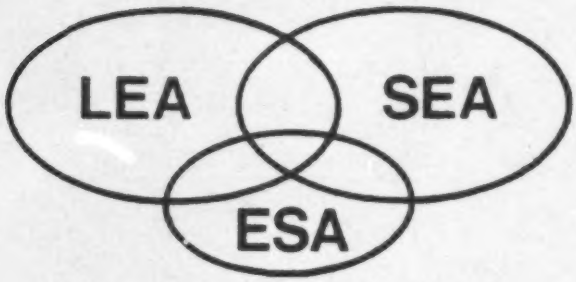
MAJOR POLICY ISSUES SURROUNDING THE EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY MOVEMENT AND A PROPOSED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA



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PUBLICATIONS OF THE ESA STUDY SERIES[a)]

*Report No. I. EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES: STATUS AND TRENDS

Part A TECHNICAL APPENDIX
Part B EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Part C QUICK REFERENCE CHART
Part D A GLOSSARY, THESAURUS, AND TAXONOMY OF ESA CONCEPTS AND TERMS

*Report No. II. THE PERCEPTIONS OF SELECTED KEY ACTORS CONCERNING ISSUES SURROUNDING EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES

*Report No. III. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND ABOLISHMENT OF A STATEWIDE NETWORK OF EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES: THE KENTUCKY EXPERIENCE

**Report No. IV. A DIRECTORY OF EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES 1977-78

**Report No. V. A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON INTERAGENCY COOPERATION, INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS, AND REGIONAL PLANNING IN ELEMENTARY/SECONDARY EDUCATION AND OTHER PUBLIC SERVICE

*Report No. VI. FACTORS INFLUENCING LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY PARTICIPATION IN THE SERVICES OF EDUCATION SERIVCE AGENCIES IN THE STATE OF TEXAS

*Report No. VII. MAJOR POLICY ISSUES SURROUNDING THE EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY MOVEMENT AND A PROPOSED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

**Report No. VIII. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR USE IN PLANNING STATE SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES

**Report No. IX. THE ROLE OF EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES IN METROPOLITAN AREAS

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a) Two other products of the ESA Study Series not shown above are: a library collection of primary documents and illustrations of exemplary ESA practices, housed at the AASA/National Organization of County, Intermediate, and Educational Service Agencies; and, the staging, in June, 1979, of an Invitational Symposium on ESAs.

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MAJOR POLICY ISSUES SURROUNDING THE EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY MOVEMENT AND A PROPOSED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

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MAJOR POLICY ISSUES SURROUNDING THE EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY MOVEMENT AND A PROPOSED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STATEMENT

Introduction

During the past half-century, policy planners and decision makers at the state and local levels have used a number of structural approaches for the improvement of state and local systems of elementary and secondary education. In recent years, the most popular alternative is the formation of some type of education service agency (ESA) at sub-state levels. The use of this alternative gained its initial interest in the mid and late 1960s, the approximate period of the demise of the reorganization of two or more local education agencies into larger administrative units, the structural alternative most widely used in the prior three decades. Interest in the education service agency concept has accelerated in the decade of the 1970s.

Education service agencies appear to be developing in three basic patterns in a large number of states.[1/] These are:

Type A: Special District ESA

A legally constituted unit of school government sitting between the state education agency and a collection of local school districts. This pattern appears to be supported by the view that ESAs should be established by the state, or the state and local education agencies acting in concert, to provide services to both the SEA and constituent LEAs.

1/ In this statement, the generic term Education Service Agency (ESA) is used to identify all three basic patterns -- the Special District ESA, the Regionalized SEA/ESA, and the Cooperative ESA.

Type B: Regionalized SEA/ESA

A regional branch of the state education agency (SEA). This pattern appears to be supported by the view that ESAs should be established as arms of the state to deliver services for the state education agency. Three variations of units of this type are used: those providing administrative services only; those providing general services only; and, those providing both administrative and general services.

Type C: Cooperative ESA

A loose consortium of local education agencies. This pattern appears to be supported by the view that ESAs should be established by two or more local education agencies to provide services exclusively to members of the cooperative. These units are further subdivided into those that are: multi-purpose (five or more services); those that are limited-purpose (not more than four services); and, those that are single-purpose.

The three types differ with regard to the four central characteristics of legal framework, governance arrangements, programs and services, and fiscal support. The dominant patterns of each concerning these four features are shown in Table 1.

While few pure illustrations exist, each of the basic forms of ESAs is presently used singularly, or in combination in a large number of states. For example, the Special District ESAs appear to be most extensively used in the eleven states of California, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. While many state education agencies have regularly decentralized some services and functions, a more limited number have established regional branches of the SEA to serve the entire state. The five states of Massachusetts,

TABLE 1

DOMINANT PATTERNS OF TYPES OF ESAs WITH
REGARD TO FOUR CENTRAL CHARACTERISTICS

Type of ESA	Four Central Characteristics			
	Legal Framework	Governance	Programs and Services	Fiscal Support
Special District ESA	tends to be structured in legislation and/or SEA regulations	tends to be lay control	tends to be determined by member LEAs and the SEA	tends to be a mix of local, regional, state and state/federal
Regionalized SEA/ESA	tends to be structured in SEA regulations only	tends to be professional advisory only	tends to be almost exclusively determined by SEA	tends to be almost exclusively state and state/federal
Cooperative ESA	tends to be general (i.e., intergovernmental regulations statutes) and/or permissive legislation	tends to be composed of representatives of member LEAs	tends to be almost exclusively determined by member LEAs	tends to be almost exclusively local and state/federal

New Jersey, Ohio, North Carolina, and Oklahoma are representative of SEAs utilizing this alternative form of education service agencies. Educational cooperatives have also been in existence in many states for a long period of time. However, some states have moved to formalize this practice. Representative of the most extensive arrangements for the encouragement of Cooperative ESAs are the developments in Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and West Virginia.

Each of what are regarded to be the basic forms of education service agencies has its proponents and opponents. Inherent in each option are a number of policy issues of critical importance to the welfare of the service agencies and to the constituents of the agencies, the local districts and/or the state. Moreover, one of the rewarding, though complex, aspects of ESA concept is that one cannot escape consideration of a number of overriding pervasive issues in education, such as state-local relations, local control of education, the best use of resources, and other fundamental issues. Indeed, the ESA concept offers an increasingly valuable platform for the debate of these issues.

Some of these policy issues appear to have been raised and successively resolved by state or local planners in the debate preceding the implementation of whatever form of ESA was ultimately put in operation. In this sense, then, the type of ESA in a state would appear to reflect clear policy choices by the actors in the debate. In other cases, it would appear that the present organizational behavior of ESAs, and the present controversy at the state and local levels regarding them, causes an observer to question the existence of a consensus concerning their role and function and how best to organize the units in a way that is consistent with their primary mission.

Since the conflux of conditions which in recent years appear to

have precipitated the use of ESAs for the improvement of state systems of elementary-secondary education have not subsided, but show evidence of accelerating in the future, this statement of major policy issues and proposed research and development agenda is offered.[1/]

Objective of this Statement

Many of the policy issues associated with the education service agency concept have been previously identified and addressed in apparently varying degrees of resolution. However, completion of a number of the tasks of the ESA Study Series both raises new issues as well as adds insight to those that have been identified in the past. Thus, the purpose of this statement on major policy issues and proposed research and development agenda is three-fold:

1. To assist policy planners at the state and/or local levels in states presently operating one or more forms of education service agencies to assess the workings of their systems by identifying, again in some instances, the central issues

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1/ The widespread interest in education service agencies is traceable to a large number of frequently interrelated developments which, while they vary from state to state, have been summarized by Stephens as: (1) a growing recognition of the limitations surrounding the move to reorganize small LEAs into larger administrative units; (2) a greater recognition that a viable structure of education is a critical requisite for the promotion of educational programming (especially from the perspective of equality, quality, and efficiency) and the structure of education in many state school systems served as an important constraint for the attainment of these complex goals; (3) a greater recognition that there is a need for more effective research and development-diffusion, and evaluation capabilities in education and that the networks and resource allocation for these purposes were frequently inadequate, fragmented, and uncoordinated in many state school systems; and, (4) a greater recognition of the need to develop more effective planning, communicative, and coordinating mechanisms among all levels in the state system of education. (E. Robert Stephens, Regionalism: Past, Present, and Future, AASA Executive Handbook Series #10, American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Virginia, 1977, pp. 7-82).

inherent in ESA;

2. To assist policy planners at the state and/or local levels in states not now operating a form of ESA by identifying what are regarded to be the central issues that should be considered in the debate over the role and function, and structure of the service agencies; and,
3. To propose for the policy and research communities a research and development agenda that will help provide a much sounder knowledge base than is presently available in order to aid the debate over the role and function, and structure of education service agencies.

Thus, the intent of this statement is not to settle issues but to raise and clarify them, and to indicate some directions in which future work would profitably be pointed. This emphasis on raising issues while avoiding prescriptive solutions is consistent with the position taken here that there probably is no one best way to structure ESAs that will apply with equal effectiveness to all state and local settings. That is, ESAs must be considered within the context of a total state system of education, and must reflect the traditions and economic, geographic, and demographic characteristics of a particular state if they are to be meaningful partners in efforts that seek to improve educational opportunities for children and youth. However, this is not to suggest that there are not a number of issues of a universal nature that should be considered in the debate over education service agencies. This statement seeks to identify the focus of a number of these considerations.

Moreover, ESAs, as they are evolving in this nation, offer one of the most challenging, but badly neglected, areas of research. This statement seeks to aid policy planners and decision makers by pointing the

direction of new thrusts into neglected areas, and, in some instances, by attaching old problems from other theoretical orientations.

Criteria Used in Identifying Policy Issues for Inclusion

The following criteria were used in selecting policy issues for inclusion in this statement:

1. Issues that are ordinarily of interest in several state systems of education and not perculiar to an individual state setting;
2. Issues that are appropriate for government action that must be answered by key decision makers at the state and/or local levels; and,
3. Issues that ordinarily involve differing interests and values.[1/]

Sources Used in Selecting Policy Issues

A number of sources were used in selecting both the policy issues highlighted in this statement, and in developing the proposed research and development agenda. Chief among these were:

1. The literature on ESAs, and on regional planning in other public service fields;
2. The unpublished reports on a number of the pre-planning activities preceding the ESA Study Series;
3. The descriptive study of selected characteristics of thirty-one

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1/ These criteria reflect a number of the thrusts of Dale Mann's execellent attempt to distinguish policy issues from operational problems. See Dale Mann, Policy Decision-Making in Education, Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1975 (pp. 10-17)

ESA networks in twenty-six states;[1/]

4. The study of the perceptions of key actors in twenty-two states;[1/]
5. The case study of ESA developments in Kentucky;[1/] and,
6. The case study of factors influencing local education agency participation in the services of ESAs in Texas.[1/]

II. MAJOR POLICY ISSUES AND PROPOSED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Introduction

This statement of major policy issues and proposed research and development agenda is organized into the following six features of ESA operations: (1) primary mission and programs and services; (2) establishment; (3) governance; (4) financing; (5) staffing; and, (6) physical facilities. For each category, consideration is given to what are regarded to be the central issues, stated in question form, and the direction that research and development activities should take in order to add to the knowledge base on each policy issue cited. Three additional R&D priorities are cited in the condluding portion of the statement.

As a further aid to the debate over each issues, the perceived primary focus, or foci, of each is also highlighted. That is, the view is held here that while most policy issues are complex and interrelated, each tends to have a major focus, or foci, that, if identified, would contribute to the quality of the debate on the issue. The five thrusts, or tests, that are regarded to be the universal reasons or justification for the existence of an education service agency, and thus are useful here, are:

1/ See inside cover of this statement for a full citation of this report.

1. The extent to which ESAs can contribute to the extension and equality of educational opportunity for children and youth;
2. The extent to which ESAs can contribute to the quality of educational practice;
3. The extent to which ESAs can contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of educational practice;
4. The extent to which ESAs can contribute to the state-local partnership concept; and,
5. The extent to which ESAs can contribute to the synergistic capabilities of local districts and/or the state.

As established above, emphasis on these five considerations should contribute to the quality of the discussions surrounding each issue. This is held to be so even in the many instances where two or more of the five tests are the suggested context within which a specific issue should be discussed.

A total of twenty-five, relatively discreet, major policy issues, and forty-one research and development (R&D) proposals are cited in the statement. It is to be recognized that many of these are interelated. A deliberate attempt was made to cite them as discreet issues or R&D proposals with the hope that this approach would be most beneficial.

Moreover, many of the policy issues and R&D proposals are more applicable to one form of education service agency than another. However, distinctions of this type are deliberately refrained from with the hope that this too will contribute to a more thorough consideration of the statement.

What is the Statement is Not

It is important to note early what this statement does not include:

1. It does not address the fundamental policy issue of whether or not local and/or state planners should support the establishment, or the continued operation of an existing service agency, or network or agencies. It is assumed here that an affirmative decision on this has been made. The policy issues cited are intended to add insight on the question of how best to implement this decision.
2. It does not address the large number of administrative or operational issues associated with the implementation of policy decisions once made. Considerations of these types are clearly important to the health of a service agency and contribute significantly to promoting or inhibiting a service unit in achieving its intended objectives. However, implementation strategies ordinarily must be viewed within the context of a large number of considerations perculiar to an individual local, regional, or state setting and thus are excluded here.
3. It does not provide an encyclopic listing of research and development priorities or an extensive list of propositions or research hypotheses but rather, as established previously, identifies the direction in which future work would profitably be pointed. This approach is viewed to be of most value to the greatest number of states and localities. Moreover, specific features of the design of meaningful research and development activities must also include important contextual considerations peculiar to an individual local, regional, or state setting.

And, finally, it should be noted that this statement is directed at state systems of education and excludes consideration of policy issues

that are of primary interest to the executive or legislative branches of the federal government. The emphasis here on state systems of education is in recognition of the fact that how states organize to deliver services is a choice of the respective states, and not a matter of federal policy.

Mission and Related
Programs and Services

Major Policy Issues. The role and function of ESAs is of course the central question associated with these units of school government. In that the mission of ESAs transcends all other considerations, it is the initial topic discussed here. And the first question concerning the role and function of ESAs is what is to be the primary mission of the units? In this regard it would seem that three basic options are available. These are:

- Should the ESAs be established primarily to provide program and administrative services that relate most directly to the state system of education?
- Should the ESAs be established primarily to provide program and administrative services that relate most directly to priorities of local school districts?
- Should the ESAs be established to provide services that relate to priorities of both the state system of education and those of local school districts?

It would appear that the debate over the central issue of the primary mission of the units would be enhanced and the likelihood of the best decision being made increased if this relatively clear issue were framed in the context of all five of the suggested tests of criticality. Indeed, it would seem, that this issue can not be answered until all five of the

complex foci are adequately considered, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Consideration of these admittedly difficult matters should suggest the intended purpose of the units, and, of equal importance, provide insight concerning the form that the ESAs should take (i.e., Special District ESA, Regionalized SEA/ESA, Cooperative ESA).

Beyond the question of primary mission, as framed thus far, a number of related issues are also critical. Some of these are obviously of greater import for one form of ESA (Special District ESAs, Regionalized SEA/ESAs, Cooperative ESAs) than others:

1. What should be the nature of involvement of the SEA, public LEAs, or the public, if any, in the determination of the primary mission of the units?
2. Should the SEA, public LEAs, or the public have review or approval authority over the programs and services of the units?
3. Should the ESAs provide services to nonpublic schools?
4. Should the ESAs provide services to other public agencies, or jointly offer services with other public agencies?
5. Should the ESAs be involved in the state regulatory system governing public and nonpublic schools?
6. Should the legislation or regulations governing ESAs allow limited or extensive flexibility in determining programs and services in recognition of differences in regional traditions and needs?

As was true of the question of primary mission, the quality of the debate over the six related program issues would be enhanced if the discussions over each were framed within the context of one or more of the five suggested foci. What is regarded to be the most useful context for discussing each of the six issues is shown in Table 2.

FIGURE 1

SUGGESTED FOCUS OF DEBATE OVER PRIMARY MISSION

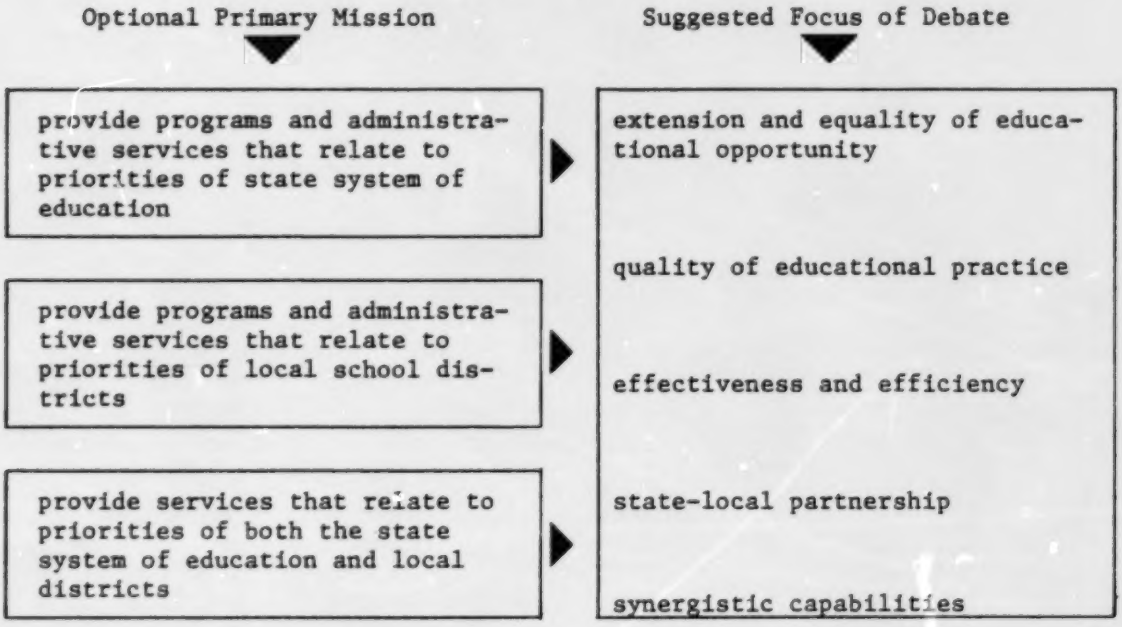

Optional Primary Mission
Suggested Focus of Debate
provide programs and administrative services that relate to priorities of state system of education
provide programs and administrative services that relate to priorities of local school districts
provide services that relate to priorities of both the state system of education and local districts
extension and equality of educational opportunity
quality of educational practice
effectiveness and efficiency
state-local partnership
synergistic capabilities

TABLE 2

SUGGESTED FOCUS OF DEBATE FOR SIX RELATED PROGRAM ISSUES

Program Issue	Suggested Focus of Debate
1. Nature of involvement of SEA, public LEAs, or public in determination of primary mission	1. equality, quality, and state-local foci
2. SEA, public LEA, or public review or approval over programs	2. equality, quality, efficiency and effectiveness, and state-local foci
3. Provide services to nonpublic schools	3. equality, and quality foci (although would also ordinarily entail an added legal dimension)
4. Provide services to other public agencies	4. equality, quality, efficiency and effectiveness foci
5. Involvement in state regulatory system	5. equality, quality, and state-local, and synergistic foci
6. Limited or extensive program flexibility	6. equality, quality, efficiency and effectiveness foci

Proposed Research and Development Agenda. It is proposed that a priority be given the following research and development emphases:

1. The effectiveness of existing types of ESAs where SEA, public LEA, or public involvement in establishing the mission of the units is extensive compared to situation where it is limited or absent.
2. The effectiveness of existing types of ESAs where SEA, public LEA, or public review or approval of the programs and services of an ESA is extensive compared to situations where it is limited or absent.
3. The extent to which existing types of ESAs in various settings contribute to equalizing educational opportunities, and the conditions that promote the role of the units in achieving this objective.
4. The extent to which existing types of ESAs in various settings contribute to the quality of educational practice, and the conditions that promote the role of the units in achieving this objective.
5. The extent to which existing types of ESAs in various settings contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of educational services, and the conditions that promote the role of the units in achieving this objective.
6. The extent to which existing types of ESAs in various settings contribute to the synergistic capabilities of units in school government, and the conditions that promote the role of the units in achieving this objective.
7. Factors that should be used in assigning functions to each type of ESA in different settings, with a special emphasis

on economic, accountability, and administrative criteria.

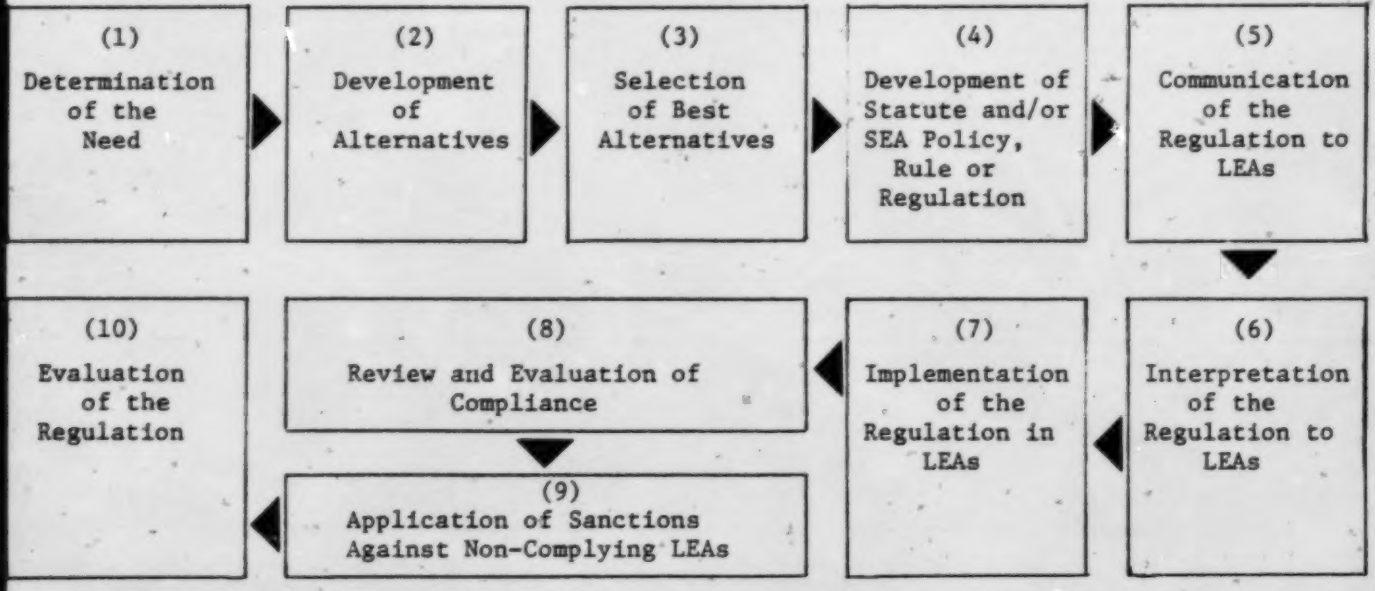
8. The effectiveness of existing types of ESAs in various settings for improving state-local relations.

9. The factors which promote or inhibit LEA participation in services of ESAs in different settings, especially: legal incentives; financial incentives; quality of ESA programs and staff; LEA enrollment; and, accessibility.

10. The quality and effectiveness of state regulatory processes in situations where ESAs are involved in one or more aspects compared to situations where ESA involvement is absent. Components of the regulatory system that should be included in probes of these types are illustrated in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

COMPONENTS OF A STATE REGULATORY SYSTEM


(1) Determination of the Need
(2) Development of Alternatives
(3) Selection of Best Alternatives
(4) Development of Statute and/or SEA Policy, Rule or Regulation
(5) Communication of the Regulation to LEAs
(6) Interpretation of the Regulation to LEAs
(7) Implementation of the Regulation in LEAs
(8) Review and Evaluation of Compliance
(9) Application of Sanctions Against Non-Complying LEAs
(10) Evaluation of the Regulation

Establishment Procedure

Major Policy Issues. A number of major policy issues are inherent in the procedures used to establish the ESAs:

1. Should the units be established by the passage of either mandatory or permissive legislation, action by the state board, a combination of these two, or by action of local school districts only?
2. Should the SEA, other state or substate level agencies, public LEAs, or the public be involved in the establishment of the ESAs, and if so, what should be the nature of the involvement?
3. Where legislation and/or regulations of state or substate level agencies are used, how prescriptive should they be concerning the mission, governance, financing and other organizational features of the units?
4. Should all public LEAs in the state, both large and small, be required to hold membership in an ESA?
5. What number of ESAs should be maintained and what criterion or criteria should be used in establishing the geographic boundaries of the units?
6. Should more than one type of ESAs be permitted to coexist in a state system of education?

It would appear that the quality of the debate over these six issues would be enhanced if the discussions surrounding each were framed within the context of one or more of the five suggested foci. For example, it would seem that the legal approach used to establish the units, the nature and extent of involvement of key actors, and the degree of

specificity of the legal approach used should be primarily viewed as state-local relations matters, although the use of other foci as important secondary considerations would also be beneficial.

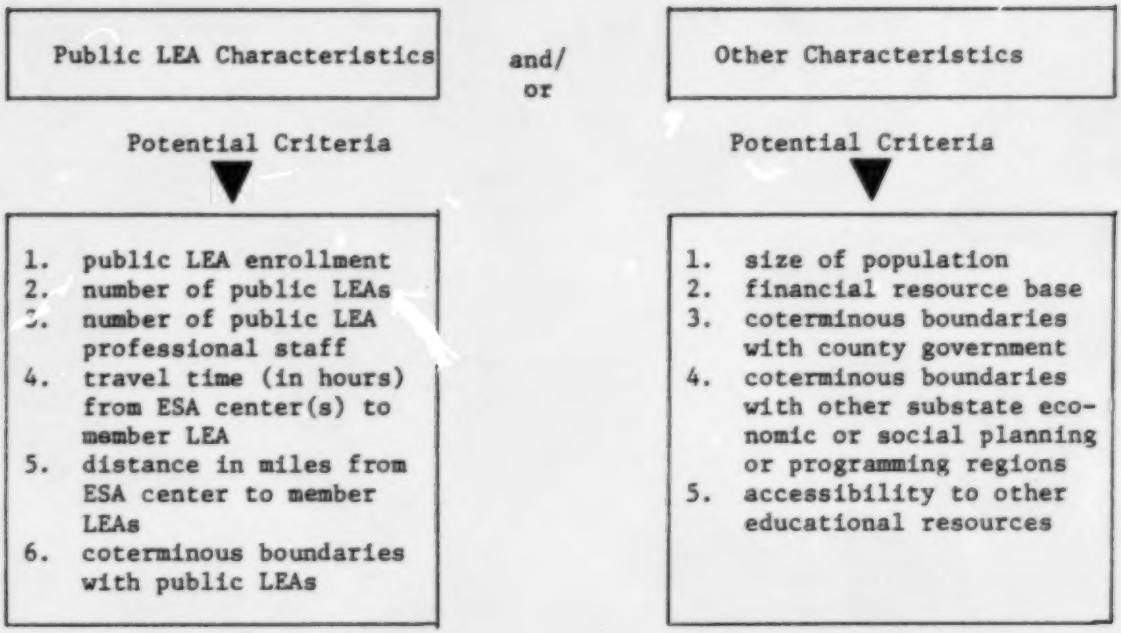
The three remaining issues, mandatory public LEA membership, number of ESAs, and permitting two or more units to function simultaneously, bear most directly on equality, quality, effectiveness and efficiency, and synergistic considerations.

Proposed Research and Development Agenda. It is proposed that a priority be given the following research and development activities:

1. The effectiveness of ESAs where SEA, public LEA, or public involvement in the establishment of the units is extensive compared to situations where involvement is limited or absent.
2. The impact of highly prescriptive legislation and/or regulations on the ability of service agencies to respond to legitimate regional differences.
3. The effectiveness of ESAs where public LEA membership is mandated rather than permissive. Especially critical here would be activities that would shed insight on the impact of excluding large enrollment size districts from membership. To be of value, probes of this types should examine the impact on the ESA, the large LEA, and on all other member LEAs.
4. The effectiveness of ESAs in states operating two or more types of service units, with special emphasis given to the quality of the service(s) offered, and their efficiency and effectiveness in contributing to the improvement of the state systems of education, and the improvement of educational practice at the local level.
5. The optimal number of ESAs in different settings and criteria

FIGURE 3

POTENTIAL CRITERIA FOR USE IN ESTABLISHING GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES OF EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES


Public LEA Characteristics
and/
or
Other Characteristics
Potential Criteria
Potential Criteria
1. public LEA enrollment
2. number of public LEAs
3. number of public LEA professional staff
4. travel time (in hours) from ESA center(s) to member LEA
5. distance in miles from ESA center to member LEAs
6. coterminous boundaries with public LEAs
1. size of population
2. financial resource base
3. coterminous boundaries with county government
4. coterminous boundaries with other substate economic or social planning or programming regions
5. accessibility to other educational resources

to use in establishing the geographic boundaries of the units in different settings in order to promote economies of scale in delivery of services of high quality. Criteria having potential in this regard are illustrated in Figure 3 above. Especially critical here are activities that would provide insight into the following factors: (a) the minimal and maximum number of public LEAs that can be served by a single unit in different settings; (b) time/distance considerations in different settings; and, (c) the impact that coterminous boundaries with other substate economic social planning and programming agencies has for promoting or inhibiting cooperative action between educational and other governmental jurisdictions.

6. The impact of both political, economic and demographic characteristics of a state, and selected characteristics of the state system of education as promoting or inhibiting factors on the development of ESAs.

Governance Features

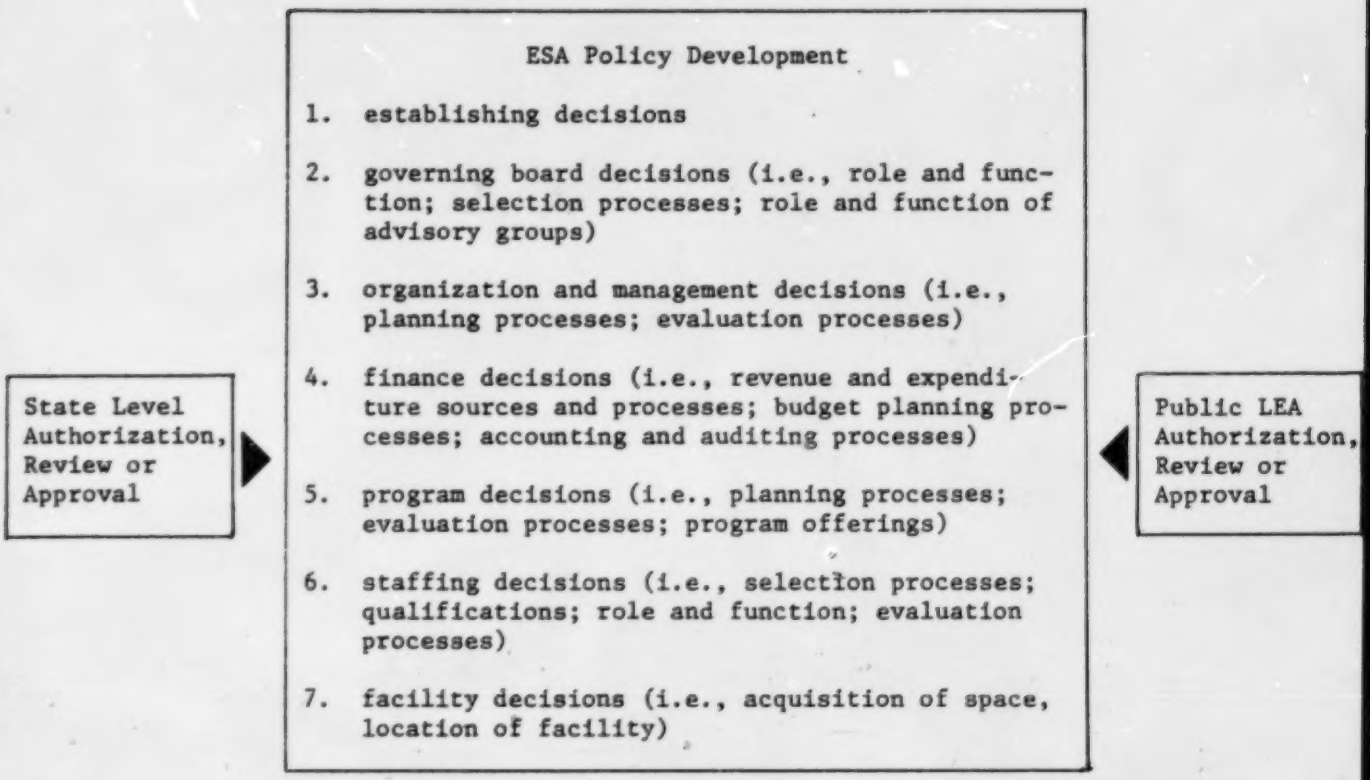
Major Policy Issues. The governance features of ESAs are the source of a number of major policy issues:

1. Should the ESAs have an independent governing body having legal responsibility for the operation of the units?
2. What should be the role and function of governing bodies concerning policy development for programs and services, financing, staffing, and other operational features of the units?
3. What method should be used to select members of the governing bodies (i.e., general election by director districts, or at-large; election by LEA representatives; appointment by LEA representatives, or by the SEA)?
4. What checks and balances should be provided public LEAs, the public, or the SEA on the working of the ESAs?
5. Should advisory groups be mandated to assist in the governance of ESAs, and, if so, what should be their role and function, and how should they be selected?

It would appear that the quality of the debate over these five basic policy issues would be heightened if the discussions concerning each were structured within the framework of three of the five suggested foci. That is, all of the discussions would be enhanced if initial and continuing attention were given to the important considerations of equality, quality, and state-local relations. It would seem that these three interests

FIGURE 4

MAJOR ALTERNATIVE CHECKS AND BALANCES ON ESAs
AVAILABLE TO STATE AND/OR PUBLIC LEAs


ESA Policy Development
1. establishing decisions
2. governing board decisions (i.e., role and function; selection processes; role and function of advisory groups)
3. organization and management decisions (i.e., planning processes; evaluation processes)
4. finance decisions (i.e., revenue and expenditure sources and processes; budget planning processes; accounting and auditing processes)
5. program decisions (i.e., planning processes; evaluation processes; program offerings)
6. staffing decisions (i.e., selection processes; qualifications; role and function; evaluation processes)
7. facility decisions (i.e., acquisition of space, location of facility)
State Level Authorization, Review or Approval
Public LEA Authorization, Review or Approval

are the overriding considerations upon which decisions about each of the issues should be made.

Proposed Research and Development Agenda. It is proposed that a priority be given the following research and development activities:

1. The quality and effectiveness of ESAs where the governing boards have limited or extensive autonomy in policy formulation.
2. The quality and effectiveness of ESAs where different processes are used to select members of governing boards.
3. The quality and effectiveness of checks and balances on the workings of ESA governing boards. Particularly useful in this

regard would be an assessment of the major alternatives illustrated in Figure 4.

4. The quality and effectiveness of ESAs having mandated advisory groups compared to those having permissive advisory bodies, or those where advisory groups are absent.

Fiscal Issues

Major Policy Issues. A number of major policy issues are inherent in the financial features of ESAs:

1. Should the SEA, other state or substate level agency, public LEAs, or the public be involved in ESA fiscal planning processes, and, if so, what should be the nature of the involvement?
2. What processes should be established to promote the fiscal accountability of the units?
3. How are the costs of ESA operations and services to be financed?

It would appear that the quality of the debate over these three basic policy issues would be elevated if the decisions concerning each were structured so that initial and continuous attention was focused on three of the recommended foci. That is, the question of financing ESA operations and services most assuredly entails the equalization of educational opportunities, the efficient and effective aggregation and use of resources, the elimination of fiscal disparities, and quality considerations.

Proposed Research and Development Agenda. It is proposed that a priority be given the following research and development activities:

1. The quality and effectiveness of financial planning processes of ESAs in different settings where involvement of state or substate level, public LEA, and the public is extensive, moderate, limited or absent.

2. The quality and effectiveness of the fiscal accountability of ESAs in different settings.
3. The effectiveness of present funding arrangements for ESAs' operations and services in different setting with regard to the three major considerations of equality of educational opportunity, the efficient and effective use of resources, and the quality of ESA operations and services.
4. The most desirable variables for use in funding ESA operations and services in different settings that would promote equality of educational opportunity, the efficient and effective use of resources, and the quality of ESA operations and services. Especially useful here would be an examination of the appropriateness of sparsity/density factors; enrollment size differences; differences in operating costs; weighted pupil or weighted LEA factors; flat grants on a per pupil or LEA basis; wealth of LEA; or effort of LEA.
5. The effectiveness of state plans for the use of ESAs in different settings in implementing federal program initiatives.

Staffing Issues

Major Policy Issues. The staffing of ESAs also represent an aspect of their operations that requires the serious attention of policy planners and decision makers:

1. Should the SEA, public LEAs, and other constituencies of the ESAs be involved in staffing decisions for the units, particularly with regard to employment and evaluation practices, and, if so, what should be the nature of the involvement?
2. How can ESAs be allowed to attain necessary staffing flexibility

in order to promote their effectiveness?

It would appear that the first issue cited above is primarily a quality question and would be best deliberated within this context, although the state-local relations is an important secondary consideration. The second should best be examined within the context of the quality consideration, and efficiency and effectiveness considerations.

Proposed Research and Development Agenda. It is proposed that a priority be given the following research and development activities:

1. The quality and effectiveness of ESA staffing where SEA, public LEA, or other clientele are involved in staffing decisions compared to situations where they are not.
2. The quality and effectiveness of procedures used by ESAs in different settings to promote staffing flexibility.
3. Closely related, the impact of prescribed state or state/federal guidelines on the staffing patterns of ESAs in different settings.
4. The impact of certification and collective bargaining practices on the staffing patterns of ESA in different settings.
5. The quality and effectiveness of mechanisms and procedures used by ESAs in different settings in addressing the integration-differentation organizational issue.
6. The quality and effectiveness of mechanisms and procedures used by ESAs in different settings to promote inter-disciplinary staffing.
7. The quality and effectiveness of staff recruitment and staff development practices used by ESAs in different settings.
8. The quality and effectiveness of staff evaluation practices used by ESAs in different settings.

9. An assessment of the competencies and skills required of ESA staff in different settings to function as members of a service organization.
10. An assessment of procedures used by relatively small ESAs in different settings to combat the "professional isolation" of staff.

Physical Facility Issues

Major Policy Issues. Several policy issues are inherent in arrangements for housing ESA operations:

1. Should the ESAs be allowed to own physical facilities, rent/lease space, or be assigned rent-free space provided by other jurisdictions or agencies?
2. Should the SEA, other state or substate level agencies, public LEAs, or the public be involved in ESA physical facility decisions, and, if so, what should be the nature of the involvement?

It would appear that the debate over these issues would be enhanced if the issues were discussed within the context of quality considerations, efficiency and effectiveness considerations, and state-local relations.

Proposed Research and Development. It is proposed that a priority be given the following research and development activities:

1. The quality and effectiveness of programs and services of ESAs in different setting who are dependent upon rent-free space.
2. The quality and effectiveness of programs and services of ESAs in different setting who maintain multiple sites for the delivery of services.

3. The development of guidelines for facility specifications for housing both general and specialized services of ESAs in different setting.

Other R&D Priorities

Efforts should be launched to pursue three additional R&D priorities. These relate to: one, research activity, work on a taxonomy of types of ESAs and two, developmental efforts, the establishment of an informations system of ESA characteristics and practices, and, the further development of a national directory on ESAs. A brief discussion of each follows.

Further Taxonomic Activities. In the exploratory study of selected characteristics of thirty-one ESA networks in twenty-six states, the position was taken that the achievement of a meaningful taxonomy was a critical prerequisite for the design of appropriate evaluation strategies for comparing types of ESAs.[1/] To aid this long-term effort, the exploratory study identified a number of characteristics that appeared to account for many of the complexities of the external environment under which ESAs function, their mode of operation, and their products -- all central considerations in taxonomic efforts and, ultimately, to meaningful comparative evaluations. While a large number of variables were identified in the exercise, the major characteristics judged to be potentially useful in subsequent activities were:

1. The primary mission of the units;
2. The method of selecting governing boards, and their role and function;

1/ Education Service Agencies: Status and Trends, ESA Study Series Report No. I., Stephens Associates, 1979, Chapter XI.

3. The designation of the executive officer of an ESA as an agent of the state;
4. The method of financing ESA operations and services;
5. The role played by the networks in achieving priorities of the state system of elementary-secondary education; and,
6. The role played by the networks in improving educational practice at the public LEA level.

Further Development of ESA Information Systems. The ESA concept represents one of the biggest movements in school government in this nation. Moreover, as established previously, it would appear that the conflux of conditions prompting an interest in this alternative for the improvement of elementary-secondary education will accelerate in the future.

The exploratory study of selected characteristics of thirty-one networks in twenty-six states attempted to provide an initial comprehensive data base on these emerging units in diverse settings. The initial effort provided a number of valuable experiences concerning the availability, quality, and utility of information. Moreover, the first effort also suggested a number of strategies concerning the framework, as well as the processes, for possible use in the continuous updating and sophistication of a meaningful information system.

The following major considerations for the development of a systematic plan for the purpose of building on the experiences of the first data system are offered:

1. The content of subsequent activities should continue to focus on the nine categories of characteristics used in the first effort. These are: establishment, governance, executive officers, organization and management, finance, programs and services, staffing, physical facilities, and SEA-ESA relations.

This formating of the workings of ESAs appeared to be useful in the first effort in that no major concerns were expressed by state and ESA officials regarding the placement of topics and the relationship of one or more probes in one category to all other categories. However, a large number of changes in the specific items that should be collected periodically should be considered, especially the further standardization of the numerous programs and services offered by ESAs. It is hoped that the two professional associations having extensive experience and a keen interest in any planned change would be deeply involved in the planning for subsequent revisions. These groups are the National Council of State Consultants for Educational Service Agencies, and the AASA/American Association of Educational Service Agencies.[1/] A careful review of the descriptive study should serve as a valuable starting point in these deliberations.[2/]

2. In all subsequent data gathering activities, every effort should be made to include all collaborative activities in each of the fifty states, not just the networks in the twenty-six states focused on in the exploratory study. This expansion would prompt the development of a national data system having even greater utility for the policy and research communities.

3. In all subsequent data gathering activities, state education

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1/ Formerly known as the National Organization of County, Intermediate, and Educational Service Agencies, an affiliate of the American Association of School Administrators.

2/ Education Service Agencies: Status and Trends, ESA Study Series Report No. I.

agencies should be the central collecting unit. The values of this approach are many: it should promote the quality of the data, enhance the efficiency of data collection, and, should facilitate the development and maintenance of state data banks.

4. Subsequent data activities should be undertaken biannually. Annual efforts, while attractive from several perspectives, would appear to be too costly. A longer period than two years would appear to greatly handicap the development of meaningful trend lines.

5. The two professional associations cited in #1 above should continue to collaborate in seeking support from appropriate federal agencies and/or other voluntary educational organizations in implementing the development of the proposed information system.

Further Development of National Directory. One of the products produced in the ESA Study Series was the compilation of a national directory of ESAs in forty-two of the fifty states.[1/] Emphasis in the first directory was given to the development of a one-page profile that highlighted:

1. The identification of ESAs in the states including full mailing address, phone numbers, and the name of the executive officer;
2. The type of service agency;
3. Eligibility of the units to receive federal funds;
4. Total enrollment in public and nonpublic schools;

1/ A Directory of Education Service Agencies 1977-78, ESA Study Series Report No. IV, Stephens Associates, 1979.

5. The number of member and nonmember public LEAs, by size of enrollment; and,
6. Programs and services offered by the units, by twenty-six broad program areas;

Also included were:

1. An index of ESAs by type and by state; and,
2. An index of ESAs by type, by state, and by program area.

The directory should be continued in subsequent years, preferably biannually, as one of the most efficient ways available to the professional community to promote the exchange of information on ESAs, an important objective in the formative period of the movement. Some of the features of the first efforts should be retained. However, a number of modifications should be made in the profiles to increase the utility of the directory. Suggestions regarding both are:

1. Add a selection on governance (i.e., elected or appointed lay board, elected or appointed members of LEA governing boards or executive officers of LEAs);
2. Retain total enrollment of public and nonpublic schools but drop the number of member and nonmember public LEAs, by size of enrollment;
3. Change program and services offered from the twenty-six check-off system to one highlighting conventional program areas in the six categories of: (a) direct instructional services to students enrolled in public LEAs; (b) instructional support services to the staff of public LEAs (as a substitute for indirect instructional services); (c) management service to public LEAs; (d) services for the state education agency; (e) services

for nonpublic schools; and, (f) services to other agencies. Further, an indication of the nature of the programming activities of ESAs would also add to the utility of the profiles (i.e., planning, administration, technical assistance).

4. Retain the one-page format; and,
5. Retain the two major indexes.

The two professional organizations cited previously should collaborate in seeking to encourage the National Center for Educational Statistics, Department of Health, Welfare, and Education to accelerate its planned activities to include ESA type agencies in its regular project schedule. The suggestions cited above will hopefully serve as the starting point in these discussions.

Concluding Comments

This statement of major policy issues surrounding the education service agency concept is intended to aid policy planners at the state and/or local levels in states presently maintaining one or more forms of ESAs, and by those contemplating the establishment of such units. A large number of major policy issues were identified as central to the deliberations concerning the role and function, and structural features of ESAs.

It was suggested that the quality of the debate concerning each of the policy issues would be heightened if each were considered within the context of one or more of the five perceived justifications for the existence of ESAs. The five tests used here were:

1. The extent to which ESAs can contribute to the equality of educational opportunity;
2. The extent to which ESAs can contribute to the quality of educational practice;

3. The extent to which ESAs can contribute to effectiveness and efficiency in educational practices;
4. The extent to which ESAs can contribute to the state-local partnership concept; and,
5. The extent to which ESAs can contribute to the synergistic capabilities of local districts and/or the state.

The appropriate application of these tests to the policy issues should promote the structuring of new ESAs, or restructuring of existing units, that would reflect the policy choices of decision makers. Also included in the statement are recommendations for the direction in which future work on ESAs should be pointed in order to add to the knowledge base available to policy planners.